

International Order and the Future of World Politics

Edited by

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Part I

Theories and strategies

1 A realist view: three images of the coming international order

Michael Mastanduno

There is no single or unified theory of realism, even though critics and proponents are sometimes tempted to treat it that way. Realism is both a way of thinking about the world and a research program containing a set of assumptions from which various realist theories and arguments can be derived, developed, and analyzed. It is not surprising that a recent scholarly attempt to test realism *per se*, as opposed to particular realist theories, found that “the scientific study of realism is difficult because it is not often specific enough to be falsifiable” (Wayman and Diehl 1994: 26). Other scholars, in recognition of this problem, have begun to disentangle the various strands of realist theory and subject each to logical and empirical scrutiny (e.g., Deudney 1993; Brooks 1997; Mastanduno 1997; Johnston 1999).

This chapter proceeds in that spirit. I contrast three realist images of the international order that are emerging in the wake of the Cold War. The first highlights economic competition among major industrial powers as the central feature of the post-Cold War environment. The second foresees a return to a traditional multipolar balance of power system. The third depicts an American-centered order, in which the United States continues to play the dominant role in a unipolar international system.

Each of these competing models contains a baseline degree of plausibility. The same is true of several non-realist images, including the clash of civilizations thesis put forth by Samuel Huntington, the vision of a liberal international community stressed by Michael Doyle, the predicted withering of the nation-state in the face of environmental and demographic stress popularized by Robert Kaplan, or the depiction of a world divided into “zones of peace and zones of turmoil,” in the words of Max Singer and Aaron Wildavsky (Huntington 1993a; Doyle this volume; Kaplan 1997; Kaplan 1994; and Singer and Wildavsky 1993). My purpose is not to survey all plausible models, but to distinguish among the leading realist contenders analytically and identify which has the most promise

empirically. After a brief examination of the common features of realist thought, I discuss each realist image of the emerging order in terms of its underlying logic and assumptions, its expectations for the behavior of major actors in the system, and its fit with the preliminary empirical evidence available since the end of the Cold War.

My overall argument is that neither geoeconomic competition nor the multipolar balance of power adequately captures the current dynamics of relations among major powers. The third image – that of an American-centered international order – best characterizes the contemporary system. I analyze the features of that system – the roles and behavior of the United States and other major powers, and the manner in which order is maintained. I also assess the durability of this international order in light of a series of challenges. I conclude that although unipolarity will not last indefinitely, US officials have the opportunity to prolong the “unipolar moment” by managing simultaneously external relations and internal constraints. Put differently, the durability of the current order will depend significantly on US statecraft, or in the words of the editors of this volume, on the “capacity to calculate” of US officials.

Realism: world view and assumptions

As a way of thinking about the world, realism is distinguished by its “pessimism regarding moral progress and human possibilities” (Gilpin 1986: 304). Realists view history as cyclical rather than progressive. They are skeptical that human beings can overcome recurrent conflict and establish cooperation or peace on a durable basis. This pessimism is rooted in both human nature and the international system. Classical realists emphasized the former. Thucydides, in accounting for the catastrophic Greek war, assured his readers that “human nature being what it is,” these tragic events would be repeated in the future (Thucydides 1954: 48). Hans Morgenthau began his classic text by observing that the conflict-ridden international arena was the consequence of “forces inherent in human nature,” and that the best humanity could hope for was the “realization of the lesser evil rather than of the absolute good” (Morgenthau 1978: 3–4).

For contemporary realists, pessimism is more apt to be rooted in the nature of the international system. The absence of a higher governing authority leads to insecurity, conflict, and the routine resort to organized violence. States can mitigate the consequences of anarchy by relying on time-honored instruments such as diplomacy and the balance of power. But they cannot escape it altogether. Statecraft is more a matter of damage limitation than of fundamental problem-solving.

Both classical and contemporary realists would accept the following set of assumptions as central to their intellectual and scholarly endeavor.¹ First, the most important actors in international politics are “territorially organized entities” – city-states in antiquity, and nation-states in the contemporary era (Keohane 1986; Gilpin 1986: 304–5). Nation-states are not the only actors on the current world scene, but realists assume that more can be understood about world politics by focusing on the behavior of and interaction among nation-states than by analyzing the behavior of individuals, classes, transnational firms, or international organizations. Realists assume further that the state – the central decision-making apparatus of the nation-state – continues to be a viable political actor and meaningful analytic construct. Stephen Krasner articulated this realist assumption clearly in 1976: “In recent years, students of international relations have multinationalized, transnationalized, bureaucratized and transgovernmentalized the state until it has virtually ceased to exist as an analytic construct. This perspective is at best profoundly misleading” (Krasner 1976: 317).

Second, realists believe that relations among nation-states are inherently competitive. Nation-states compete most intensely in the realm of military security, but compete in other realms as well, in particular in economic relations. To say that nation-states “compete” means that states care deeply about their status or power position relative to other states, and that this concern guides state behavior. Competition is a consequence of anarchy, which forces states ultimately to rely on themselves to ensure their survival and autonomy. This does not imply cooperation is impossible, only that states will approach cooperative ventures with a concern for their impact on relative power positions (Grieco 1990).

Third, realists emphasize the close connection between state power and interests. States seek power in order to achieve their interests, and they calculate their interests in terms of their power and in the context of the international environment they confront. While all states seek power, it is not necessary to assume that states seek to maximize power. Not every state needs or wants nuclear weapons, for example. Similarly, although security and survival are the highest priority in terms of state interest, there is no need to assume that states always strive to maximize security at the expense of other goals. States pursue an array of interests. The key point for realists is that in defining the so-called national interest, state officials look “outward,” and respond to the opportunities and constraints of the international environment.

Fourth, realists assume that state behavior can be explained as the product of rational decision-making. As Robert Keohane puts it, for the realist “world politics can be analyzed *as if* states were unitary rational

actors, carefully calculating the costs of alternative courses of action and seeking to maximize their expected utility, although doing so under conditions of uncertainty” (Keohane 1986: 165). States act strategically and instrumentally, in an arena in which the “noise level” is high. The problem of incomplete information is compounded because states have incentives to conceal or misrepresent information to gain strategic advantage. Consequently states may miscalculate, but for realists not with such frequency as to call into question the rationality assumption (Mearsheimer 1994/5: 9).

These assumptions constitute the starting point for realist analysis. They do not lead to a unified understanding of contemporary world politics or to a single theory of state behavior. Each realist image below embraces these core assumptions. But, by making additional assumptions and emphasizing different features of contemporary international politics, they arrive at different assessments of the emerging international order.

Model I: geoeconomic competition

The traditional realist depiction of the international system emphasizes security competition among sovereign states under the ever-present threat of war. Military force is a routine instrument of statecraft employed by states to gain territory, extract resources, or enhance prestige. Limited military conflicts among major powers can become costly and protracted, and can escalate into the all-out struggles typified by World Wars I and II. From this perspective, hegemonic wars are a reflection of and a reaction to the changing distribution of power and prestige among the great powers in the international system (Gilpin 1981; Levy 1983).

To many observers, however, contemporary world politics presents a very different picture. Developments in military technology, most obviously the nuclear revolution, have raised the costs of warfare among great powers to almost prohibitive levels (Mueller 1989; Jervis 1989). The acquisition of territory or resources by force is no longer recognized as a legitimate “right” even of the great powers. Territorial acquisition in any event may be of diminishing utility as knowledge resources overtake natural resources as the principal stimulant to national wealth and power (Rosecrance 1986).² Great power war no longer plays the role it once did as the primary mechanism for adjustments in the balance of power. The intense rivalry of the Cold War ended peacefully and the Soviet empire collapsed without precipitating a major international conflict. Many believe that the possibility of hegemonic warfare among great powers has become exceedingly remote.

Put differently, in the post-Cold War world the military security and survival of the major powers are not challenged as they have been in the past. Randall Schweller recently argued that the key concept for understanding great power competition is not security but scarcity (Schweller 1999). In some international environments, military security is a scarce commodity. But in others, it is not. The key question arises as to whether realism is still a useful analytical construct in an international environment in which military security is plentiful because great power warfare is unlikely.

The answer given by “geoeconomic” realists is yes. They contend that the diminution of great power *military* competition does not signify the end of great power competition. Positional competition shifts to other arenas, most importantly to the world economy. Nation-states remain the principal actors, and their competition for markets, raw materials, high value-added employment, and the mastery of advanced technology becomes a surrogate for traditional military competition. Success in geoeconomic competition brings the nation-state economic prosperity and discretion in its foreign policy. It also enables the state to remain at the cutting edge of military research and development. Geoeconomic realists believe that economic and technological competition will remain at the center of great power relations until traditional security competition reasserts itself. Military security may once again become a scarce commodity if military technology changes radically or if and when revisionist states assert themselves as great powers seeking to change the international status quo.

Numerous examples of geoeconomic realism can be found in the academic and policy-oriented literature after the Cold War. Kenneth Waltz wrote in his 1993 assessment of the emerging international order that “economic competition is often as keen as military competition, and since nuclear weapons limit the use of force among great powers at the strategic level, we may expect economic and technological competition among them to become more intense” (Waltz 1993: 59). Samuel Huntington similarly claimed that “in the coming years, the principal conflicts of interests involving the United States and the major powers are likely to be over economic issues.” He went on to assert that the idea of economic relations as a non-zero-sum game “has little connection to reality,” and that Japan has “accepted all the assumptions of realism but applied them purely in the economic realm” (Huntington 1993b: 71–3). Richard Samuels and Eric Heginbotham develop the latter line of argument into the concept of “mercantile realism,” and associate with it the ideas that security threats are as much economic as military, that powerful states will engage in “economic balancing” and that geoeconomic interests may be pursued at the expense of traditional political and security interests

(Heginbotham and Samuels 1998: 190–4). Popular versions of these and related arguments are evident in recent books by Lester Thurow (1992), Jeffrey Garten (1992), Laura Tyson (1992), and Edward Luttwak (1993).

Proponents of the geoeconomic model of international order associate the following types of behavior with their worldview. First, they expect great powers to mobilize for international economic competition. Since that competition is vital to national security, states are likely to shape their national economic systems in a way that creates or reinforces advantages for their national firms. Partnerships between government and industry in research and development, export promotion, industrial policies, selective protectionism, and the shedding of costly military commitments are all plausible strategies depending on the competitive position of any particular nation-state.

Second, geoeconomic realists expect governments to be sensitive to relative gains or relative position in their foreign economic policies. Contemporary great powers recognize that international economic relations produce economic benefits for all concerned. But they remain wary of the fact that in any situation or relationship, some states may benefit more than others. States will therefore seek to adjust policies or minimize relationships that bring disproportionate gains to other major powers, and emphasize those that bring disproportionate gains to themselves.³ Geoeconomic realists believe that states will be sensitive to relative gains regardless of whether the potential for military warfare is proximate or remote.⁴

Third, geoeconomic realists expect powerful states to organize their relations with their weaker neighbors in order to enhance their position in great power economic competition. This expectation usually manifests itself in the familiar projection of a post-Cold War world divided into three competing economic blocs. Thurow, for example, foresees competition among a US-led bloc centered around NAFTA, a European bloc led by Germany and extending into Eastern Europe, and an Asian bloc organized by Japan (Thurow 1992). Even though these blocs are unlikely to be completely exclusionary, geoeconomic realists expect that the dominant power in each region will assure that the bulk of economic advantages will accrue to it rather than to its economic competitors. The anticipated systemic consequence is that the forces of regionalism will gradually undermine the commitment to global liberalization in the world economy.

Assessment

The geoeconomic model has inspired considerable criticism. Economic liberals contend that at best it exaggerates the zero-sum aspects of what is

fundamentally a non-zero-sum activity, and at worst it encourages governments to pursue, in the name of national security, shortsighted and ultimately destructive economic policies. Paul Krugman argues that concern over national competitiveness is a "dangerous obsession." Individual firms compete, and may or may not be competitive; nation-states do not compete or have competitiveness in the same way (Krugman 1994). Miles Kahler finds fault with the idea that the end of the Cold War necessarily leads to a destructive economic regionalism (Kahler 1995: 5). Others question whether multinational corporations retain any meaningful national identity and take issue with the image of these firms lining up with particular nation-states in international competition.⁵ Still others, including Joseph Nye and Henry Nau, believe that the geoeconomic modelers have been too quick to dismiss traditional security and alliance concerns that are still prevalent after the Cold War (Nye 1992).

Debates over the analytical and policy wisdom of the geoeconomic model will continue. But to what extent does this image of international order accurately characterize great power relations after the Cold War?

The model appeared most promising in the immediate aftermath of the Cold War. The Soviet Union collapsed because it failed economically more than militarily. The rising power, Japan, was an economic rather than military superpower. Japan's success was directly associated with its national system of political economy, which equated international economic competition with war and forced government, finance, and industry to collaborate with a long-term focus on the conquest of foreign markets. The states of Western Europe, struggling to compete with the United States and Japan, developed an ambitious regional integration scheme to create a market the size of America's, joint industrial policies to emulate Japan's, and a common currency to counter the dominance of the dollar.

Europe's integration plan came on the heels of the US-Canada Free Trade Agreement which was subsequently expanded to include Mexico. These regional initiatives coincided with the stalemate and 1990 collapse of the Uruguay Round talks intended to accelerate multilateral trade liberalization. The main protagonists in the GATT conflict, the United States and European Union, indicated by their behavior that regionalism was a viable alternative.

The seeming emergence of regional blocs in Europe and North America created anxiety in Asia. One politically charged reaction came in the form of Malaysian Prime Minister Mahathir's proposal to create an East Asian Economic Caucus (EAEC) which would exclude the United States, Australia, and New Zealand. Japan's political reaction to this proposal was muted, but Japan's trade and investment patterns in any event had

gradually been shifting to Southeast Asia as the yen appreciated and US-Japan trade conflicts mounted. Between 1986 and 1990, the US share of Japan's exports dropped from 38.5 to 31.5 percent and the East Asian share increased from 24.7 to 30.9 percent (United States Embassy, Tokyo 1992).

A further indicator of geoeconomic competition was the changing role of the United States. For most of the postwar era, US foreign economic policy emphasized the multilateral system and placed broad diplomatic and security interests ahead of the pursuit of particularistic economic interests. By the late 1980s, the United States had shifted to "aggressive unilateralism" in pursuit of its economic interests (Bhagwati and Patrick 1990). During the FSX crisis of 1989, the economic agencies of the US government forced the security agencies to reconsider, at considerable diplomatic cost, a military co-development agreement with Japan because it might be commercially disadvantageous to the United States (Mastanduno 1991). In 1992, President Bush turned a traditional head-of-state visit to Japan into a commercial sales mission on behalf of the US auto industry.

In its first term the Clinton administration went even further and elevated export promotion and the pursuit of economic interests to the very top of the US foreign policy agenda (Stremlau 1994/5; Mastanduno 1997). Administration officials embraced explicitly the use of industrial policy for commercial as well as military applications, and launched a series of government-business partnerships to assist US firms in international competition. The Defense Advanced Research Projects Agency (DARPA) dropped "Defense" and changed its name to ARPA as a symbol of the administration's new emphasis. The Commerce Department dedicated a "war room" to tracking the progress US firms made in competing for major export contracts around the world.

In light of these developments, it is not surprising that a flurry of books heralding the new geoeconomic order emerged in the early 1990s. Yet almost as quickly, the appeal of this model has faded. Developments at the national, regional, and global levels have undermined geoeconomic competition as a compelling vision of post-Cold War international order.

After what proved to be a brief experiment, the United States returned by the mid-1990s to its postwar norm of granting priority to international security concerns. This is apparent in US policy toward both Europe and Asia. US officials have downplayed economic conflicts and aggressive unilateralism, and instead have employed foreign economic policies to reinforce broader security concerns.⁶ The United States has initiated a New Transatlantic Agenda with the European Union designed to resolve existing trade conflicts, deflect future ones, and seek out opportunities for mutually beneficial economic collaboration. The thrust of US policy

toward Japan since 1995 has not been market access, but the strengthening and expansion of the US-Japan Security Treaty. US officials have viewed and responded to the Asian financial crisis less as an opportunity to make relative gains and more as a threat to regional security and global financial stability. They have sought to engage Russia and China economically, even at the risk of strengthening those states as future economic competitors. And, despite constant criticism from the US business community, the United States continues to resort routinely to unilateral economic sanctions, even though those sanctions hurt US firms in international competition (Jentleson 1998).

Two factors account for the US shift away from geoeconomic competition. First, the initial euphoria that the post-Cold War world would be stable and peaceful gave way to a realization by US policy makers of threats to regional security that required careful management. The United States almost went to war over the North Korean crisis of 1994, and faced another serious challenge in the Taiwan Straits crisis of 1996 (Oberdorfer 1997). The conflict in Bosnia, which US officials initially considered Europe's problem, became America's problem as it threatened to tear NATO apart. The US response in both regions has been to strengthen existing alliances and de-emphasize disruptive economic disputes.

Second, by the middle of the 1990s the United States seemed to have regained some measure of international economic primacy. Much of the United States' aggressive unilateralism had been directed at Japan's challenge to US commercial, technological, and financial hegemony. By the late 1990s the Japan challenge seemed to have collapsed, and US officials became more concerned with bolstering a weak Japan than with beating down a strong one.

The image of geoeconomic blocs in conflict also waned by the mid-1990s. The anticipated "yen bloc" did not materialize. Japan, pressured by the United States, never signed on to the EAEC and instead supported APEC, an institution that supports economic liberalization and "open regionalism," i.e., a regionalism that includes the United States as a major player (Grieco 1999). Similarly, initial expectations (and fears) of a "Fortress Europe" proved exaggerated. The European Union has generally remained open to US and Japan trade and investment. The United States, in turn, has supported the emergence of a single European currency, even though the Euro has the potential to challenge the dominant international role of the dollar. The GATT did not collapse; the Uruguay Round was completed successfully and a more prominent institution, the WTO, replaced the GATT. Regionalism exists, but regional blocs have proved to be neither a substitute for multilateralism nor the defining feature of post-Cold War international economic interaction.

Finally, the deepening of interdependence has limited both regional blocs and the extent to which states can engage in zero-sum geoeconomic competition. The integration of global commercial and financial markets has made economic “blowback” a serious concern to major powers. Because Japan is a major player in the world economy, it is not surprising that the main concern of US officials in the 1997–8 Asian financial crisis was to prevent its spread to Japan. The United States cooperated with Japan in strengthening the yen, and prodded Japan to revive its domestic economy so that it could help to accelerate regional recovery.

Model II: a multipolar balance of power

Multipolarity characterized international politics between 1648 and 1945. Diplomatic and economic interaction among great powers was routine in this classic balance of power system. No single power dominated and alliance commitments were flexible. The bipolar system that emerged after 1945 was an historical anomaly. The United States and Soviet Union were deemed “super” powers to indicate their extraordinary rank. They were large, economically self-sufficient by historical standards, possessed weapons of mass destruction, and faced off in an ideological Cold War in which alliance commitments remained fixed.

For many realists, the collapse of bipolarity in 1989 signaled a return to a traditional and more normal multipolar system. The elimination of the Soviet Union left the United States as the sole superpower, but in realist and especially neorealist theory, a unipolar order is even more of an anomaly than a bipolar one. The reasoning, laid out most systematically by Kenneth Waltz, is that states balance power, and thus the accumulation of preponderant capabilities in the hands of any single state will stimulate the rise of new great powers, or coalitions of powers, determined to balance the dominant state (Waltz 1979). The logic of international interaction suggests that the unipolar moment is at most a brief transition to a renewed multipolar system.

The theme of incipient multipolarity is common in post-Cold War realist writings. John Mearsheimer stated in 1992 that “bipolarity will disappear with the passing of the Cold War, and multipolarity will emerge in the new international order” (Mearsheimer 1992: 227). Christopher Layne expects the same, and writes that “in a unipolar system, states do indeed balance against the hegemon’s unchecked power” (Layne 1993: 13). Waltz’s 1993 article explored the prospects and potential of the emerging great powers – Japan, Germany, China, the European Union, and a revived Russia (Waltz 1993). Henry Kissinger predicts that the United States will remain the most powerful but will become a “nation

with peers” in the emerging international order (Kissinger 1994: 805).

Proponents of the multipolar image have stated clear behavioral expectations. Multipolarity will emerge fairly quickly because states will not tolerate preponderance over an extended period. In direct contrast to the geoeconomic model, military or security competition among great powers will remain the distinguishing feature of international politics. Relations among great powers, and in the international system more generally, will be characterized by conflict and instability rather than harmony and stability (Mearsheimer 1992: 214). This is true regionally as well as globally.⁷ Nuclear weapons will proliferate, not only to less powerful states but also to Japan and Germany who will wish to avoid being blackmailed by nuclear great powers (229).

We should expect Japan and Germany to abandon their Cold War status as “trading states” and become independent great powers that are not subordinate to the United States. As Layne asserts, “a policy of attempting to smother Germany’s and Japan’s great power emergence would be unavailing because structural pressure will impel them to become great powers regardless of what the United States does or does not do” (Layne 1993: 46–7). Russia and China, singly or as part of a larger coalition, will balance the United States. Cold War alliance systems will collapse or fade; recall Waltz’s often-quoted statement that NATO’s days are not numbered, but its years are. Security alignments will become more fluid on the familiar realist premise that today’s friend may be tomorrow’s enemy.

Assessment

The geoeconomic model appeared most plausible immediately after the Cold War, but became less plausible as time passed. For the multipolar model, the opposite is likely to be true. Its principal expectations were not met in the first post-Cold War decade, and may not be in the next decade or two either. As more time passes, however, the international system is likely to move closer to that model.

To be sure, some expectations of the multipolar model have been borne out, at least partially. The pessimism of multipolar realists has proven well-founded in that recurrent conflict has characterized the post-Cold War world, most dramatically in the Balkans but elsewhere as well. Nuclear tests by India and Pakistan in 1998 revived concerns of inadvertent nuclear war and the specter of widespread proliferation. Japan and Germany have become somewhat more assertive. Each desires a permanent seat on the UN Security Council and both have contributed peacekeepers to regional conflicts. Government officials, particularly

from France, Russia, and several Middle Eastern states, have expressed uneasiness about the dangers of a one superpower world and at times have directed their resentment explicitly at US officials or policy.

But the central expectations of the multipolar model have not been fulfilled. There has been no meaningful effort to balance the preponderant power of the United States. A fluid system of alliance commitments has not emerged. Instead, the Cold War alliance systems dominated by the United States have been reaffirmed and strengthened. Former adversaries of the United States have been more interested in integration into the US-centered international order than in challenging the legitimacy of that order.

Japan's foreign policy since the end of the Cold War has centered on the strengthening of the US-Japan Security Treaty, including maintenance of US ground forces and the US nuclear guarantee. Japanese politicians rarely question the necessity of US ground forces, and when they do they are quick to emphasize the critical importance of the bilateral alliance itself (see, e.g., Hosokawa 1998). Japan has not opted for an independent defense force, and in 1995 reaffirmed its status as a non-nuclear power by signing on to a permanent extension of the Nuclear Nonproliferation Treaty. For Germany, the US-led NATO alliance remains the cornerstone of national security strategy. Germany deflected French demands for a European defense force independent of NATO, and German officials continue to view the US military presence as essential to the security and stability of Europe (Art 1996). Other European states, France in particular, have sought to bind themselves to their powerful German neighbor rather than balance it. The vulnerable states of Central Europe, caught between Germany and Russia, have not sought to acquire nuclear weapons as anticipated by proponents of the multipolar model. Instead, they have lobbied to join an expanded NATO.

Despite having their differences with the United States, neither Russia nor China has sought to organize a balancing coalition against it. Each has flexed its power close to home; Russia in the "near abroad," and China in the Taiwan Straits and South China Sea. But neither has staked out a position of global revisionism. Each has sought recognition as a responsible member of the existing international community and integration into its economic and security institutions.

Revisionist challenges since the end of the Cold War have involved lesser powers rather than great powers. Iraq upset the balance of power in the Middle East and was struck down by a US-led coalition. North Korea defied the nonproliferation regime and was bought off with a compensation package. Serbia expanded in the Balkans in the early 1990s, but since 1994 has been contained uneasily by a US-sponsored peace plan and NATO deterrent threats.

For its part, the United States has in no way accepted the inevitable multipolar world envisioned by its realist proponents. Instead, the United States has dedicated its post-Cold War foreign policy to preserving the status quo in security relations with its Cold War allies, and to engaging and integrating its Cold War adversaries into an order that reflects the design and preserves the dominant position of the United States.

Model III: a unipolar, US-centered system

Most realists would accept that the international system since 1990 has been unipolar. They would disagree with respect to its durability. Advocates of the multipolar model anticipate the imminent collapse of unipolarity; others believe that the unipolar moment has the potential to last longer, say for a total of twenty to thirty years.⁸

Two arguments underpin the belief in the durability of unipolarity. One focuses on US capabilities. The United States emerged during the 1990s with a commanding lead in the technologies of the information revolution, in the same way that Britain dominated the new technologies of the industrial revolution at the beginning of the nineteenth century. America's "information edge" has enabled it to lead and exploit a Revolution in Military Affairs (RMA) that involves the utilization and integration of intelligence and reconnaissance, command and control, and the precision use of force (Nye and Owens 1996). Mastery of the same information technologies supports US economic dominance, particularly in computer software, telecommunications, financial services, and arms production. Technological primacy, military and economic power, and ideological appeal combine to offer the United States strong potential to remain the world's only superpower in the years ahead.

The second argument concerns threat perception. I have argued elsewhere that unipolarity can only endure if balancing behavior is a response to threat as well as to capabilities (Mastanduno 1997).⁹ If balancing is a response solely to capabilities, then by now we should have witnessed other states attempting to counter US preponderance. But if balancing behavior is also triggered by threat, then whether or not states balance against a dominant state will depend on the international environment and on the foreign policy behavior of the dominant state. An international environment that is dangerous or threatening is likely to prompt potential great powers to mobilize military capabilities. Similarly, a dominant state that is aggressive or provocative is more likely to inspire balancing behavior than one that is reassuring or accommodating. A dominant power can shape the international environment in a way that reassures rather than provokes potential challengers. By its own behavior, the unipolar power can affect the calculations of other

states and help to convince them that it is neither necessary nor desirable to engage in a balancing strategy.

Implications for the behavior of the dominant state follow from the logic of the unipolar model. We should observe it making a consistent effort to preserve its privileged position. Security threats to the dominant power are minimized and its foreign policy autonomy is maximized in a unipolar world. That situation is preferable to being one of many great powers in an uncertain multipolar world, or to facing off against the concentrated hostility of an adversary in a bipolar world. Unipolarity is the best of all possible positions in anarchy; it is consistent with realist logic that any great power should prefer to be a unipolar power regardless of whether or not it possesses expansionist ambitions.

We should expect the unipolar state to engage and integrate – in effect, to try to co-opt – potential great powers who do not have clear revisionist intentions. Unambiguous revisionist challengers are impervious to accommodating behavior, and thus in relations with them we should anticipate that the dominant state will adopt a confrontational stance. But, in relations with status quo states and states whose intentions are unclear, we should find that the dominant power adopts policies of reassurance, engagement, and accommodation intended to reinforce the belief that the existing international order is desirable and acceptable.¹⁰ Specifically, we should expect the dominant state to assure that its own behavior is not threatening; to use its foreign policy to help deflect other threats to the security of potential challengers; to stabilize regional conflicts that involve other great powers; and to find opportunities to confer international prestige on other powers as a substitute for full great power status.

It is also reasonable to expect the unipolar state to rely on multilateral decision-making in its foreign policy. Powerful states are tempted to act unilaterally, and the temptation is greatest for a unipolar power. But multilateral procedures are more reassuring to other states and may help to convince them that their preferences matter and that they are not simply being directed to follow the dictates of the dominant state.

Assessment

Some would argue that US foreign policy since the end of the Cold War has lacked an overall strategy and has been indecisive and inconsistent (see, e.g., Lieber 1997). That criticism has some validity, especially if one focuses on the early years of the Clinton administration or on particular foreign policy problems such as the aborted intervention in Somalia. In general, however, the US has followed a consistent strategy of seeking to preserve its preponderant position. As Benjamin Schwarz recently put it,

“America’s foreign policy strategists have hoped to keep the reality of international politics permanently at bay” (Schwarz 1996: 100). This US objective, for obvious reasons of diplomacy, has not been emphasized in foreign policy rhetoric, which has focused instead on the liberal goals of promoting democracy, individual rights, and open markets. But occasionally it does slip into public discourse. In 1992, for example, the grand strategy of preserving unipolarity leaked out in the form of a subsequently much-discussed Pentagon planning document which concluded that, following the defeat of the Soviet Union, “our strategy must now refocus on precluding the emergence of any future global competitor” (cited in Mastanduno 1997: 66).

The strategy of preserving preponderance has been clear in the US approach to other major powers. US policy has been dedicated to dissuading Japan from becoming a normal great power with full and independent military capabilities. The Asian strategy of “deep engagement” calls for the United States, over the indefinite future, to maintain the forward deployment of US forces, stabilize regional security, and strengthen the security commitment to Japan for a new era (Nye 1995). US officials took the initiative in responding to the Korean crisis of 1994. They attempted to dissuade North Korea from obtaining nuclear weapons – a step that could plausibly have led Japan to obtain them as well. In 1996, as regional and bilateral tensions mounted, the Clinton administration assured that US economic disputes with Japan were set aside so that the two governments could focus on deepening their security preparations in the event of a future crisis.

In Europe, US officials have continued the Cold War strategy of harnessing the great power potential of a now unified Germany while simultaneously providing for its security. NATO is the key element, and US officials have made clear their intention to expand the alliance into the historically turbulent zone of Central Europe and maintain it indefinitely.¹¹ When the United States finally took the lead in Bosnia, one crucial objective was to repair the damage to NATO caused by sharp disagreements between the United States and its major European partners over how to handle the conflict.

US policy toward Russia has been dedicated to forestalling a revisionist challenge and encouraging Russian support for the international status quo. US officials have offered the prospect of full integration into the institutions of the capitalist world economy in exchange for domestic political and economic reform. In a move designed in part to bolster its battered prestige, the G7 summits of advanced industrial states now include Russia. The Clinton administration also worked out a compromise to allow Russian forces to participate in the Bosnian peacekeeping

effort under US command, when it became obvious that Russia was unwilling to serve under NATO command. Russia clearly has perceived NATO expansion as a political affront and security threat, so US officials have sought to reassure Russia by searching for formulas and institutions that might make NATO expansion more politically palatable to Moscow.

The central thrust of the Clinton strategy toward China – “comprehensive engagement” – is to offer a US-Chinese partnership, with China as the junior partner, as long as China behaves responsibly and meets its international obligations in the judgment of the United States. The United States would prefer that China be a liberal state, but appears to consider a non-liberal China acceptable as long as China accepts a subordinate role in the existing international order. President Clinton revived head-of-state summitry with China in 1997, and with great fanfare in 1998 made the first visit to Beijing of a US President since the Tiananmen Square massacre of 1989.

In relations with all major powers, the United States has tried to demonstrate that greater benefits accrue from accepting rather than from challenging the unipolar order. It has reinforced that message by punishing lesser powers, such as Iraq, who exhibit revisionist ambitions at a regional level. US officials have also relied heavily on multilateral mechanisms to promote their objectives and develop an international consensus behind them. The military and diplomatic efforts to restore international order in the Persian Gulf, Korean peninsula, and the Balkans were led by the United States but involved multilateral coalitions. The response to the Asian financial crisis of 1997–8 reflected US preferences for domestic deregulation and open markets, but was orchestrated by the IMF.

The United States has managed during the first post-Cold War decade to preserve its preeminent position in a global order that reflects its preferences. But will it be able to do so for another decade or more beyond that? The future durability of the international order depends on the ability of the United States to meet three challenges. Each will be difficult in its own right, and the three must be met simultaneously.

The first and most important is to continue to discourage the rise of states that combine formidable economic and military capability with global ambition. The task was relatively easy in the first unipolar decade. Japan and Germany showed little inclination to abandon their identity as “trading states.” Europe emerged as a potential economic powerhouse, but without a unified foreign and defense policy. Russia remained devastated economically and unprepared militarily. China received considerable attention as the most likely challenger, but only on the assumption that it would maintain over an extended period the economic development, political stability, and military modernization needed to fulfill its

potential. Several Middle Eastern states harbored deep resentment of US hegemony, but none was sufficiently powerful individually, and collectively Middle Eastern states have proven incapable of the political unity required to produce a great power challenger.¹²

Nevertheless, as anyone who witnessed the end of the Cold War can attest, the international system can change dramatically in a decade. Korean unification could leave Japan paradoxically feeling both more vulnerable and less willing to support the continuation of a US defense presence in the region. Russian economic recovery could be accompanied by the mobilization of nationalist sentiment and a desire to make amends for the humiliation of the Cold War settlement. China might fulfill its potential and demand the respect and influence it believes it is owed by the West. Other challengers – a nuclear-capable India or Brazil, for example – could move from the middle ranks to become major players with conceptions of international order that differ significantly from that of the United States.

The challenge for US diplomacy in this uncertain environment will be to accommodate and co-opt states that lean towards the status quo, confront revisionist states, and, most importantly, distinguish between the two. Hans Morgenthau wrote in his classic realist text that the ability to distinguish and respond appropriately to status quo and revisionist states was the “fundamental question” of statecraft, and that the answer determined the “fate of nations” (Morgenthau 1978: 67–8).

The second US challenge is to manage and minimize what has been termed the arrogance of power.¹³ The dominant state in any international order faces strong temptations to go it alone, to dictate rather than consult, to preach its virtues and to impose its values. In the case of the United States, these temptations are compounded by a democratic political tradition that blurs the distinction between state and society and imbues foreign policy with the values of society.

Efforts to impose values or to “preach” to other states create resentment and over time can prompt the balancing behavior that the US engagement strategy is seeking to forestall. As the Bush administration learned, when the top officials of the world’s most powerful state begin to proclaim “a new world order” after a military victory, other governments, even friendly ones, become very uneasy.

The Clinton team has had similar experiences. The President began with strident public pronouncements and a determination to place the protection of human rights at the center of US China policy. He was forced to retreat amid charges of US arrogance and with the fear that his policies were alienating a country with great power ambitions and the world’s largest population. Similarly, the Clinton administration angered

its closest trading partners by supporting legislation that extends American sanctions unilaterally and extraterritorially against foreign firms that do business with Cuba, Iran, and Libya. "This is bullying," complained Canada's Foreign Minister, "but in America you call it global leadership." One US official responded to the chorus of criticism in 1996 by stating that "we're America, and they'll get over it" (quoted in Erlanger and Sanger 1996). The administration apparently recognized subsequently that it was wrong to assume others have no choice but to accept their place in a US-centered order. By 1998, it found a face-saving way to diffuse the conflict and retreat without imposing any sanctions.

The third challenge is for US officials to maintain domestic support for the political and economic policies needed to preserve preponderance. This may prove to be the greatest challenge. It is difficult to mobilize and maintain public support, after the war has been won, for the task of "preserving stability" in the absence of a clearly defined, unifying threat.

Significant parts of the US Congress and public have become increasingly reluctant to bear the political risks and economic costs of the US global engagement strategy. With the Cold War over, they are skeptical of the need for US military intervention in distant lands, and intolerant of casualties when intervention takes place. They resent what they perceive as the "free ride" that America's closest allies still enjoy in military operations and economic relations. They resent free trade and globalization when it seems to lead to the loss of US employment. And they do not have the patience for a comprehensive partnership, over the long term, with a communist state that does not respect the human rights of its citizens in a way that is fundamental to the American political tradition.

Preserving preponderance requires US officials to manage the internal as well as the external environment. During the first Cold War decade, the Bush and Clinton administrations deflected the formation of a protectionist coalition and kept some momentum in the direction of freer trade. In military intervention, they sought to avoid extensive commitments, minimize costs and casualties, and develop "exit strategies" even at the risk of leaving unfinished business. They extracted resources from other major powers to assure the US public that the United States was not bearing the financial burden of maintaining international order on its own.

US officials, in effect, adopted a two-sided strategy. They attempted to accommodate foreign powers, but not in a way that provoked or mobilized potential domestic opponents. They also tried to accommodate domestic opponents, but without provoking a challenge from foreign powers. Whether this dual balancing strategy can be maintained and for how long remains to be seen.